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SUBJECT: NINEWA: SCIRI RESISTS KURD EXPANSIONISM

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Classified By: Ninewa PRT Team Leader James Knight: 1.4 (B) and (D).

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: At a February 20 meeting with Ninewa IPAO Holtsnider, Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) members underscored that provincial must happen as soon as possible and before resolution of Ninewa's 'disputed territories' under the Iraqi Constitution's Article 140 to protect against Kurd efforts to incorporate large portions of Ninewa into the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). SCIRI in Ninewa primarily represents the province's Shabak minority, and all SCIRI members present at this meeting were Shabak normally resident in al-Hamdaniya District. SCIRI leaders favored a locally-administered Shabak region in eastern Ninewa. END SUMMARY.

RELENTLESS KURD PRESSURE

¶2. (C) The meeting was led by Yahya al-Haydari, SCIRI's Chair in Ninewa. Provincial Council senior SCIRI member Aref Yousif Qamber opened the meeting by detailing a lengthy list of grievances against Kurdish authorities, both in Ninewa and the KRG. Qamber began with strenuous objection to the Kurdish Alliance position (frequently articulated by Ninewa Deputy Governor and KDP Chair Khasro Goran -- reftel A) that Shabak are in fact Kurds and thus without a basis to object to incorporation into the KRG. Qamber continued to complain that Kurd domination of Ninewa's Provincial government has prevented Shabak farmers from tilling their land. He also observed that Iraqi Army (IA) forces in eastern Ninewa are simply Kurdish Peshmerga militia in IA uniforms, and that many Shabak and other Shia have been rejected when they attempt to join the Iraqi Police (IP) and IA.

ELECTIONS NEEDED SOONEST

¶3. (C) SCIRI representatives emphasized that provincial elections should be held as soon as possible. SCIRI Provincial Council member Nabeel Natheer Ahmad indicated that SCIRI supports the Provincial Council's elections committee, but he was not confident that the Iraqi High Electoral Commission (IHEC) will have adequate resources in Ninewa to oversee a fair election. Qamber added that he would like U.S. and international election monitors for such provincial elections, since the January 2005 provincial election was

fraught with irregularities.

FLAWED ARTICLE 140 PROCESS IN NINEWA

¶4. (C) Qamber raised objections to selective Kurd application of Article 140's 'normalization' process, noting that many Kurds sent south under Saddam's Arabization program have already returned to Mosul, while Arabs forced north are rapidly being evicted. He insisted that security forces ignore violence not directed against Kurds in Mosul, which effectively forces non-Kurd residents to flee. He pointed out that more than 4,500 families have fled Mosul for other areas of Ninewa -- these population shifts will significantly change demographics of smaller districts.

¶5. (C) SCIRI Provincial Council member Mohammed Ibrahim Ali noted recent opposition success in opposing Kurdish Alliance attempts to dominate Ninewa's Provincial Council debate, and observed Shabak, Sunni Arab, Christian, Turcoman, and Yezidi Council representatives had United to combat Kurd expansionism (reftel B).

AN AUTONOMOUS SHABAK AREA?

¶6. (C) Qamber also noted that Ninewa's Shabak should have the right to establish their own locally-administered regions (as potentially foreseen by Article 118 of the current Iraqi Constitution). Qamber proposed an autonomous Shabak region within Ninewa in the area between Mosul and Bartalah.

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COMMENT

¶7. (C) The KRG expansion agenda is facilitating the evolution of a de facto anti-Kurd coalition in Ninewa, in which SCIRI is a key player. Bartalah is a largely Christian city, and ironically many of them support the KRG -- in part because they benefit from KRG Ministry of Finance Sarkesi's patronage as potential recruits for his proposed Christian autonomous region on the Ninewa Plain (reftel D), and because they see the KRG as protecting Christian interests from the Shabak in Bartalah area. Like most of Ninewa's Arabs and minorities, SCIRI in Ninewa believes that Kurds will rig eventual Article 140 referenda in favor of incorporating significant areas of Ninewa into the KRG, and is likely to be successful doing so in view of Kurd control of Provincial government and Iraqi security forces. END COMMENT.
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